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ELECTED AND FISCALLY INDEPENDENT SCHOOL BOARDS ARE A NECESSITY

A Brief Submitted

to the

ROYAL COMMISSION ON METROPOLITAN DEVELOPMENT
OF CALGARY AND EDMONTON

by

✓ THE ALBERTA TEACHERS' ASSOCIATION

November, 1954

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I

INTRODUCTION

Mr. Chairman and Members of the
Royal Commission on Metropolitan Development
of Calgary and Edmonton

The Alberta Teachers' Association appreciates the opportunity of presenting this brief for the consideration of the Royal Commission on Metropolitan Development of Calgary and Edmonton.

The Alberta Teachers' Association has not as yet formulated a policy about metropolitan areas. The Association, however, has some definite views on educational administration and it believes these merit consideration before any metropolitan area is established.

Following is a general policy resolution of the Alberta Teachers' Association that has been approved on several occasions by councillors in annual general meeting.

BE IT RESOLVED, that the Alberta Teachers' Association ask the provincial government to amend The County Act to make provision for an elected school board that shall have as one of its responsibilities the requisitioning and the control of the funds for educational purposes, and further
BE IT RESOLVED, that The County Act in no case be implemented without a favourable plebiscite of the taxpayers concerned.

II

EDUCATION: A PUBLIC SERVICE

That education is considered a public service, no one would deny in the face of centralized provincial control over administration, content, and method. However, it is submitted that education is much more than a public service, since it is charged with the grave responsibility of inculcating, in the young, a way of life, and also of making possible improvements, through succeeding generations. All this is irrevocably bound to our democratic institutions which will thrive only as education keeps our people aware of their worth.

That legislatures have not always had this function of education clearly in mind is borne out by the variations in the amount of independence granted to boards. In some cases, the school board has full power to levy and collect taxes. In most cases, the school board, while having corporate status, has the municipality collect its taxes. In Alberta, the school board is partly subservient to the municipal council in that the municipal council may exercise some control over increases in annual requisitions. In five counties the operation of schools is entirely under municipal control. Mainly, education has been administered by representatives of local communities under the direction of the Department of Education of the Province of Alberta.

It is appropriate to review next the position of the various levels of government with respect to education. We are all familiar with the British North America Act which states, "In and for each Province, the Legislature may exclusively make laws in relation to

Education. " In Canada, the province is the sole authority for regulating education. However, the Act does not lay upon the provincial government any legal responsibility to legislate or to take cognizance of educational affairs. On the other hand, because the people of the province believe that every child shall have an opportunity to obtain adequate schooling, and that the cost of this schooling shall be apportioned with reasonable fairness it becomes the responsibility of the provincial legislature to regulate education adequately.

III

CONTROL OF EDUCATION

Education is such a direct personal service to the members of a community that its successful operation demands close co-operation between the school and community. Experience has demonstrated that the most strenuous efforts to enlist local interest by means of local advisory boards are generally ineffective. Many citizens will not serve on boards that are only advisory. They must be given the necessary administrative authority to act for the community.

Historically, there have been many changes in the structure and organization of education during the past fifty years, but there have been few administrative changes. Years ago, most school districts operated one-room schools. Since then through district reorganization, the proportion of one-room schools has decreased considerably with fewer and fewer one-room school districts remaining each year.

Tables 1, 2, and 3 which follow, indicate the trend towards centralization of schools.

Table 1 shows that, while the number of school districts in existence has increased by 16, the number of school districts and systems in operation has decreased by 1566 during the period from 1938-39 to 1952-53.

Table 2 gives a breakdown of the type of schools operated in 1952-53.

Table 3 gives the classification of schools by number of classrooms for the three years beginning 1950-51, and shows a decrease of 297 one-room schools during that three-year period.

These figures indicate that there is in Alberta a definite trend towards centralization and this trend is evident also in British Columbia and Saskatchewan.

Table 1 *

<u>Year</u>	<u>No. of school districts in existence</u>	<u>No. of school districts and systems in operation</u>	<u>No. of rooms</u>
1938-39	3992	3592	6082
1952-53	4008	2036	6552

Table 2 *

Number of one-room schools	1248
Number of two-room schools	170
Number of three-room schools	86
Number of four- or more room schools	532

Table 3 *

<u>Number of class-rooms in school or school system</u>	<u>Number of schools 1950-51</u>	<u>Number of schools 1951-52</u>	<u>Number of schools 1952-53</u>	<u>Two-year increase in schools</u>	<u>Two-year decrease in schools</u>
1	1545	1394	1248	-	297
2	182	174	170	-	12
3	81	78	86	5	-
4	90	93	105	15	-
5	39	38	60	21	-
6	39	41	48	9	-
7	30	35	48	18	-
8	24	20	55	31	-
9	19	14	28	9	-
10	13	19	31	18	-
11 or more	74	85	157	83	-
Total	2136	1991	2036		100

* Annual Report, Department of Education, 1953
tables 2 and 1, page 108, and table 6, page 113, respectively

At the same time there has been a tremendous expansion of urban population. In fact, this Royal Commission on Metropolitan Development of Calgary and Edmonton has been established to investigate and make recommendations regarding the problems attendant upon urbanization around the cities of Calgary and Edmonton.

Because of the school district organization prevalent fifty years ago, provincial governments were probably reluctant to delegate much responsibility to local school boards. They were given fairly complete financial, but only limited administrative and supervisory responsibilities. Through the years, school district organization has attempted to keep up with the changes in the structure of our society. In the area of administration, however, departments of education have tended to maintain the same controls they have always had. It is only recently that departments of education have begun to delegate more responsibility. This may have resulted from the rapid expansion of the school system to the point where it is not effective to handle all administration from a central office. On the other hand, it may have resulted from a realization that more local control is healthy for education.

In any case, if there is to be more democratic local control, then such responsibilities as selection of textbooks, development of programmes of study, and maintenance of standards, will be passed on to the school boards, and certain of these responsibilities will in turn be delegated to the schools themselves. It can be expected, therefore, that those people who accept responsibility locally for

education would be required to give considerable time and thought to their expanded duties. The education committees of county councils, because of other duties outside the field of education, are not likely to have the time necessary to discharge these expanded educational duties effectively. Nor is it likely, for the same reason, that they will be able to devote themselves to educational matters with as much singleness of purpose as school boards are now able to do.

IV

FISCAL RESPONSIBILITY

Fiscal responsibility, as well as local control, must be given the local community. If a large measure of administrative authority is to be retained by and extended to school boards, they must be placed in such a position that the consequences of their decisions will directly affect local tax rates. Pressure upon them to administer both efficiently and economically must be local, immediate, and continuous. This means that school boards must be fiscally independent and they must be elected.

The Alberta Teachers' Association believes that an elected fiscally independent school board is the most satisfactory link between a local area and the central authority which acts for society in general, in view of the fact that society has such an important stake in and concern for the education of its children.

The Alberta Teachers' Association also believes that elected fiscally independent school boards are more sensitive to local opinion than dependent school boards or education committees of county councils, because elected school boards are directly responsible to the electorate for their actions.

In Canada, the large majority of school boards are fiscally independent, at least to the extent of current expenditures, and the tendency, if any, is to grant more independence. Two recent examples of opposite trends might be reported. Since the passage of The County Act in Alberta in 1950, five county units have been established.

In these education is administered by a committee of the county council. In British Columbia, on the other hand, all school districts have been made completely independent of municipal authorities for capital borrowing under the Public Schools Construction Act of 1953.

In the United States, the only other country in the world with comparable history and practice in education, the tendency in recent years is towards more fiscal independence.

Whether the administration and financing of a local school system should be operated separately or as an integral part of the general municipal government is a question which at present is somewhat controversial. The research on the problem, as it relates to the financing of education, seems to indicate clearly that there is no substantial advantage in terms of economy under either plan. The only actual research into differences in operating costs under fiscally independent and fiscally dependent boards has been done in the United States. McGaughy compared city school systems which were fiscally dependent with those which were fiscally independent.¹ He found no statistically significant difference in the costs of education under the two plans. It appears that the decision as to the degree of independence which should be accorded school systems should not be based on grounds of financial economy only. In the words of Strayer and Haig, "the separate financing of municipal school systems must be considered on other grounds than that of the cost to the community,

¹ McGaughy, J. R. "The Fiscal Administration of City School Systems." Educational Finance Inquiry Commission, Vol. 5, Macmillan, 1924.

since the costs of schools administered under the dependent and independent organizations are approximately equal."²

In addition to the preceding general statements, there are a number of other arguments for having education administered at the local level by an elected fiscally independent school board. The following points in favour of fiscally independent school boards are advanced by Mort and Reusser.³

1. Fiscal independence is right in principle. Since both the school corporation and the city receive their authority from the state and the city controls functions that are local in nature while education is considered as a function of the state, there should be no dependence of the schools upon the municipal government.
2. Fiscal independence is not a violation of the principle of taxation. Both the city and the school district are granted certain taxing privileges for special purposes. Rather than two competing tax bodies, they are two agencies of the state, each taxing for a certain purpose. The state and not the local government is the taxing authority.
3. Fiscal independence works better in practice. Not only does this study show a slight superiority of the fiscally independent cities over those fiscally dependent, but there is usually more dissatisfaction, both among the citizens and among members of boards of education, in dependent than in independent cities.

²Strayer, C.D., and Haig, R.M. "The Financing of Education in the State of New York." Educational Finance Inquiry Commission, Vol. 1. Macmillan, 1923, p. 205

³Mort, Paul R., and Reusser, Walter C. Public School Finance. McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1941, p. 70.

4. Fiscal independence makes for a continuity of educational policy. Long-term planning, which is essential in school building programmes, as well as in other budgetary items, can be carried on with more assurance of funds when the board is fiscally independent.
5. Fiscal independence provides adequate financial safeguards for the community. Financial responsibility is definitely fixed and financial safeguards can as easily be erected under fiscal independence.

Besides the above five points there are three other significant factors indicating the desirability of having fiscally independent boards. These are.

1. It is not only difficult but really impossible for a school board to be in fact responsible to the people and to the province if there is any intermediary authority standing between it and the province.
2. A fiscally independent school board, having an active educational policy, is able to expand its educational programme.
3. Public education is sufficiently complex and important enough to have its policies and its budget determined by a board which gives exclusive attention to that function.

The position taken by some political scientists is that education is merely one kind of community service, and that the amount of support given to it should be determined by the municipal authority

which alone can weigh school needs against all other needs such as fire and police protection, roads, sewers, and all the rest. Surely, the taxpayer should be the final judge. If elected school boards are spending too much money, the members can be defeated at the next election. Moreover, on tax notices, the school tax is shown separately from the general tax. The final decision is left to the taxpayer, the ultimate source of all local authority.

The stand taken by some economists is that no agency of government should be in a position to requisition some other government agency for funds. The claim is made that there is no justification and that it is an unsound principle to have a school board make a *re-*quisition on a municipality. While it is granted that the principle here enunciated, that no government should be in a position to requisition another government, is a sound economic principle, the conclusion with regard to school boards is based on a misconception. It is unfortunate that the term "requisition" is used in Part IX of The School Act, 1952, when clearly the intent is only that the municipality is collecting the tax for the convenience of the school board and the taxpayer. This interpretation is corroborated by Sections 304 and 305 which empower the Minister to direct any district to levy and collect its own taxes.

In some parts of Canada, school boards actually levy and collect taxes. Generally, however, municipalities collect taxes for school boards. The school tax rate and amount are shown separately from the general rate and amount. This avoids the necessity of setting

up duplicate tax collecting agencies. Certainly municipalities are providing a collection service for school boards, but they are not actually being requisitioned for funds. Elected school boards are responsible at all times to the people for the funds that are collected for them and which they spend.

Two types of thinking about the problem of fiscal independence have just been discussed: that of the political scientist and that of the economist. The political scientist usually sees education as just another community service; the economist believes the agency that collects the taxes should spend them. It has been shown that these arguments are based on misconceptions. The confused thinking has resulted from the fact that the arguments have been about the superficial aspects of school board-municipal relationships, and not about the fundamental problem, that of control, particularly local control.

The Alberta Teachers' Association believes that there should be local control of school board expenditures, but it does not believe that either the municipal council or another government agency should exercise any supervision. It maintains that, so long as there are adequate controls through the local taxpayer, that is all that is required. This is entirely in keeping with the statement that there must be a large measure of local democratic control. It is submitted that, for current expenditure, there need be no control by either a municipal council or an agency of the province, and that, for capital expenditure out of borrowing, the school board should refer to the electorate.

Sufficient external fiscal controls are exercised by the Department of Education grant structure. Current expenditure is controlled through the grants provided for the foundation programme, while capital expenditure is controlled through allowances provided by the Department of Education. Moreover, it should be reiterated that school boards are actually responsible at all times to the electorate for current and capital expenditure because the members are elected. The Alberta Teachers' Association can see no need for any further surveillance by external authorities.

It is only through an informed democratic electorate that education will become the vital force it should be in our society. The Alberta Teachers' Association believes that the purpose of education can be best achieved by fiscally independent school boards which are given wide administrative responsibilities as well as sole fiscal authority.

SECURITY OF THE TEACHER

In the event that a metropolitan area is established at either Calgary or Edmonton, or both, a large number of schools and teachers will be placed under a new administrative system. Many complications are bound to arise. The Alberta Teachers' Association submits that the Royal Commission on Metropolitan Development of Calgary and Edmonton should give careful consideration to the factors¹ affecting the security of teachers and make recommendations with respect thereto.

No member of the teaching profession should suffer loss of salary or position on the salary schedule because of a change in organization and administration. The security of the teachers concerned must be safeguarded.

In the metropolitan areas under study certain variations in salary schedules are already in effect. Each one of these has been negotiated with particular reference to its own area and each has a clause, or clauses, that undoubtedly benefit the particular staff. Such variations would include: full placement for experience according to increment structure, allowances made for qualifications, allowances made for administration and supervision, size of annual increments, cumulative sick leave, and minimum and maximum salary in each category.

With respect to administrative positions certain measures of protection are given under the terms of The School Act, 1952. The same cannot be claimed for the classroom teacher who is subject

to transfer at any time. It may well be that many teachers would choose to remain in their present schools rather than be transferred.

The Alberta Teachers' Association therefore suggests that such matters be considered by this Commission.

VI

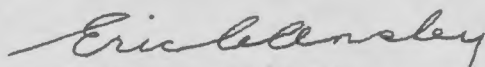
RECOMMENDATIONS

The Alberta Teachers' Association believes that the case for fiscal independence of school boards warrants your serious consideration. It believes that school boards do not have sufficient fiscal and administrative independence at the present time. It believes that consideration must be given to protecting the rights of teachers who may be affected by any newly organized metropolitan area.

The Alberta Teachers' Association recommends:

1. that all the members of school boards should be elected;
2. that for current expenditure and capital expenditure out of current revenue, school boards should be completely independent;
3. that for debenture borrowing school boards should refer to the electorate through a by-law;
4. that municipalities should collect school taxes for the school boards; and
5. that no teacher should suffer a loss of salary or position.

The Alberta Teachers' Association,



ERIC C. ANSLEY,
General Secretary-Treasurer.

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